



Cleveland
Metroparks



Discover Enjoy Protect

For 96 years, Cleveland Metroparks has been giving us new ways to connect with nature.



Brian Zimmerman,
Cleveland Metroparks CEO



Connecting With Nature

Cleveland Metroparks continues a tradition of preserving and promoting the region's "Emerald Necklace."

STORIES BY KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE

Call it **breathing room** — or a wild place to hang out. It's a great nature escape, and no matter where you live in Northeast Ohio, you are minutes away from Cleveland Metroparks. A nearly 23,000-acre necklace of green space, Cleveland Metroparks encircles our region and connects our communities with the natural world.

Though Cleveland Metroparks is the oldest park district in Ohio, with a centennial a few years away, its mission has remained constant: conservation, education and recreation. And with the acquisition of more than 14 miles of lakefront park property expanding the "Emerald Necklace," and projects strengthening the Park District's accessibility and visibility in our communities, Cleveland Metroparks continues to sustain its role as a living asset to our region. "Cleveland Metroparks truly gives Cleveland a competitive advantage over any other city in the country," affirms Brian Zimmerman, Cleveland Metroparks CEO. With the towpath serving as a "spine" and the parks connecting one community to the next, Zimmerman relates how one can hop on a bike trail in Lakewood and trek to Chagrin Falls, and beyond. "And with the 97 percent occupancy downtown is enjoying right now, those residents have an opportunity to come back through the park system and connect with the Zoo, Big Creek Parkway, Bedford Trail Connection — there are so many possibilities," Zimmerman says, noting that there are more than 60 communities connected directly to Cleveland Metroparks, and three-fourths of those contain actual parkland. "With these positive connections, we want to continue to be the leader in green space conservation," he says.

The long-term (99-year) lease with the City of Cleveland to manage its lakefront properties is a significant milestone for Cleveland Metroparks. Already, beaches are being combed and investments have been made in equipment to focus on maintaining clean beach spaces. "You are already seeing clean beaches re-

turn, and we have brought a whole new wave of recycling to the beach and a new level of maintenance standards," Zimmerman says. Huntington Beach is a prime example of how the region's other Lake Erie beaches can become gems. Huntington Reservation is part of Cleveland Metroparks tradition (a reservation since 1927), and is the only beach in Ohio and on Lake Erie certified as a Blue Wave Beach by the Clean Beaches Coalition of Washington, D.C., an environmental beach certification program. "Our ultimate goal is to improve the overall quality of the sand features in Cleveland Metroparks lakefront parks, from Huntington to Euclid Creek Reservations. The outer-belt system of Cleveland Metroparks embraces Cleveland, and the lakefront parks cap it off," Zimmerman says of the synergy.

Cleveland Metroparks closed its deal with the city on June 6 this year. Meanwhile, Cleveland Metroparks continues to operate a fiscally responsible organization that is a separate political entity from city, county and state. Since 1920, Cleveland Metroparks has had the ability to raise its own levies. And Cleveland Metroparks has maintained a debt-free status throughout its existence. Despite a \$12 million loss in state funding during the last three years, Cleveland Metroparks has met its obligation and promise to voters, Zimmerman says. That's thanks to reviewing energy efficiency across the Park District and its 400-plus buildings, increasing earned revenue and more aggressively seeking grant opportunities.

Cleveland Metroparks has not faltered in its vision to enhance people's lives with the parks and create opportunities for us to enjoy nature. "I think our founder, William Stinchcomb, would be very proud of the direction Cleveland Metroparks is taking and how the leadership has really furthered his plan," Zimmerman says.